

Let Love Continue
Hebrews 13:1-7
Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

Bethany Baptist Church
August 11, 2019

...pray...

Four years ago this summer we studied the NT commands to ... “*one another.*”

I.e. How does God want us to *live together* as bros & sis in Christ?

There are about **50** *one another* texts in the NT, and several are repeats of others.

So when you *sift them out* into groups, there are about **30 distinct** *one another* commands.

By far, the most *repeated* and thus perhaps the most *important*, is the *directive* to “**love one another.**”

As in **1John 4:7** – *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God...*

But love can be easier to *say*, and maybe even *explain*, than it can be to *do*!

So how *do you* ...**love one another**?

Let’ open our NT together to Hebrews 13: 1-7 (focus on vv.1-3)...

It’s *true*! Our study of Hebrews has *drilled down deep* into a *gold mine* of *gospel doctrine*!

The Christian life **is built** on what you *believe* (ch.1-10), but it’s *proved* by how you *live*.

And the greatest *fruit* of real *faith* in real *truth* may be *love*!

Six directives to love the brethren every day in every place.

(Today:)

1. **Hear the command (v.1)**
2. **Love the stranger (v.2)**
3. **Remember the prisoner (v.3)**

(Next week:)

4. **Honor your marriage (v.4)**
5. **Cultivate contentment (vv.5-6)**
6. **Consider your leaders (v.7)**

Hear that leading command again: (v.1) *let love of the brethren continue.*

1. Perhaps you've heard that there are **three** primary Gr terms in the NT referring to *love*:
 - a. In brief...
 - i. **agape** – often associated w/ *God's love*; *Christian love*.
 - ii. **eros** – associated with *sensual love*.
 - iii. **phileo** – *brotherly love*
 - b. That **third** love-word (*phileo*) forms the *backbone* of v.1 and the *starting point* for the rest of these instructions (2-7): *phileo* → v.1 - **philadelphia**: "*brother love.*"
 - i. *Brotherly love*, as an ideal, was greatly respected in the 1st century, including the *philosophies* of its *pagan culture*!
 1. But, of course, we would argue that the gospel *ratcheted* the *understanding* and the *practice* of **love** to entirely *new levels*, in every *understanding* of the word!
 - ii. Perhaps *love's* most important ingredient is **unselfishness** ("**otherness**").
 1. Which means *love* is closely related to *humility* (= *I'm not the center of the universe*).
 2. And it means our *love* for one another is always *modeled* by God's *love* for us in sending Son... That relationship is *all over* the Bible's teachings about *love* and our *love* for *one another*...
 3. **1Jn3:16** – *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*
 4. **1 Jn 4:10,11** – *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

2. Where do you *find* a **love** that would *lay down its life* for someone else...?
 - a. Are you a *Christian...* (*following* Jesus by *faith* in His death & resurrection)? Then the ingredients of *brotherly love* are already in you!
 - b. Paul wrote (Gal 5:22): *the fruit of the Spirit is....love!* Love is a part of *garden* that the Holy Spirit *cultivates & grows* in the *good soil* of your *new heart!*
3. But if *love* is already a part of my new life, then why this command...? *Let brotherly love continue?* If the Spirit is already *behind* it, what's *stopping* it!
 - a. Because there are always *pests & weeds* that threaten love's *growth...*
 - b. The *pest* that attacks *loving humility* is *pride*. The *weed* that threatens to choke out "*otherness*" is *self-love*.
 - c. The *basic threat* of course is *sin*. Jesus said (Matt 24:12) – "*And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.*"
4. Then if love can/must be *commanded* to be *continued*, there must be ways to *encourage* its *care* and *feeding*. The *text/context* will help us get started!
 - a. Did you notice how *abrupt* the change is from **12:29** to **13:1**? From *our God is consuming fire* to *let brotherly love* continue?
 - i. A *holy fear of God* is powerful *incentive* to keeping His *commands* (**12:28** – *reverence & awe* → *acceptable service*).
 - b. And then notice that *brotherly love* is the first *command* in ch.13's list of *instructions*. I generally see the first position as a hint that this command informs every command that follows it.
 - i. So *love* is implemented & strengthened by (2) *hospitality* and (3) *sympathy* and (4) *purity in relationships* and (5,6) *contentment* and (7) *submission*.

In other words, we will "continue in love" as we obey the Bible's "one another" commands in the holy fear of God.

Love the stranger (v.2)

1. But *love of the brethren* is **not** defined by the *membership roll* of your congregation (that's simply the *right place to start*)!
 - a. The next directive is to *show hospitality* to strangers.
 - b. In fact, the definition of the Gr word here (*hospitality*) was lit. "*love of strangers.*"
 - c. The *instruction* is simple: when a Christian from *another* town comes through *our* town and *needs help* (room & board), we *help* him!

2. *Hospitality* was a practical and needful expression of *love* in the 1st century! *Inns* in the Roman Empire were *dirty, dangerous & morally questionable*. Roman literature documented the complaints:
 - a. **Aristropanes'** *The Frogs* – inn w/ fewest *flees*?
 - b. **Plato's** *The Laws* – wrote of an innkeeper held guests as *hostages*
 - c. **Theophrastus (Theo-frastus)** – inns like *brothels*

3. There are several *commands* and *examples* of Christian hospitality in your NT (Paul, Peter, John):
 - a. Consider the Apostle John's commendation of an *elder* named **Gaius (3 Jn 5-7)**: *Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren and esp when they are **strangers**; and they have testified to your **love** before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name.*
 - b. Over time, the Romans build approx **50K** miles of hard-surface roadway! Most for *military* purposes, but it those *highways* would serve **all** manner of *traffic*.
 - c. The *travelers* of the NT could be *apostles* (Paul), their *teams & couriers, missionaries* (*sent out for the sake of the Name*), *traveling church leaders*, or simply *Christian travelers* on personal business.

- d. While most of the commands to *show hospitality* are directed to *all* believers, there is an emphasis on a connection between *hospitality* and *leadership*. *Elders* are to be examples of *hospitality*.
- i. **1 Tim 3:2** – *An overseer, then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...*
 - ii. Paul will repeat that same *elder* qualification – *hospitality* – in his *leadership* list in **Titus 1:8**.
 - iii. But most *compelling of all* are the words of our **Lord Jesus (Mt 25:40)**: “*to the extent you **did this** to the least of one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me.*”
4. Admittedly, *hospitality* has always had its *risks*. At the very least, the *untidy, unhelpful* guest who creates *more work* than they really should! A very early and popular *Christian Discipleship Manuel* title the *Didache* (“*Teaching*”) has some guidelines for dealing with *questionable guests*:
- a. “*Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain more than one day; or two days, if there is a need. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.*”
 - b. Yet to *balance* our natural *concerns*, we read of the intriguing *possibility* of playing host to an *angel*: one of **God’s couriers!**

- c. You ever go into one of those *restaurants* where they have all these *pictures* behind the counter of all the *celebrities* who've eaten a *cheeseburger* in their *diner*? *Autographs* that no one can read....
 - i. How about a *selfie* with **you** & the *apostle Paul* standing in front of your *fire-place*!?!
 - ii. **John MacArthur** makes a very helpful observation about the idea of *entertaining angels*: perhaps the real point here is **not** that a *celestial celebrity* sampled your *spaghetti*, but that you might never know (“*unawares*”, “*w/o knowing it*”) just how important **your** *small kindness* is in *God's Grand Strategy*.
- 5. Suffice it to say, this really a *practical* love-command: loving strangers **helps them**, **can** be an *evangelistic witness* to people watching your life, and **just might give** an *important boost* to *critical Kingdom advance* by helping some *courier* of the *Captain of Our Faith* – maybe even that *angel*! ☺
- 6. **OBWT**, we might need some of you to *implement* this command in *Sept*! We are involved in the upcoming **On Mission Celebration**. As a part of that, we will be asked to:
 - a. Provide *transportation* and provide a *place to stay* for a missionary or two.
 - b. If you can help, I expect you will be a **little inconvenienced** and a **lot blessed**! (I'd love to hear from you after the service.)

Jesus said: “I was in prison and you visited Me.” Our writer must certainly remember *that* command as he pens *this* one ... read v.3.

1. I’ve told this story so often in the past year that you could probably tell it for me...
 - a. *Hebrews* was written in mid/late **60s AD (as in Nero, not Elvis...)**
 - b. Hebrews’ *first audience* was a church(s) made up of *Jews* who had come to Christ. Along with some who were still *undecided...or skeptical*.
 - c. Christians had been *persecuted* in the past, including some of these *believers*. Now, *persecution* seemed to be growing on Nero’s *radar*.
 - d. Some of these church-goers were tempted to *slide out the back-door* of the **church** and *head back* to the **synagogue**. To **forsake** the *gospel* for the Torah... The *New Covenant* for the Law...

2. The command (3) is the next expression of *brotherly love*. **Remember the prisoners...remember the ill-treated**.
 - a. So as the *storm of persecution* draws near, v.3 identifies **two** categories of brothers & sisters who really need some love – if not *now, soon....*
 - i. The *prisoner & the ill-treated*.
 1. Some would be *incarcerated* for following Christ.
 2. Others (*more, I’d assume*) would be *ill-treated (tormented)* for their faith.

ii. And this is really **one** *problem* here that cries out for our *same response* – *suffering met by brotherly love*:

1. *Suffering* – spec (here) *persecution*. Beloved, turning to Christ is **not** taking the *exit-ramp* away from *suffering*.
 - a. In fact, there is *no end* to biblical evidence that God *intentionally, premeditatedly* uses suffering to *refine & harden* your faith (1 Pt 1; Jas 1) and *mold you* into the *image of Christ* (Rom 8).
 - b. The only *exit-ramp* from *suffering* is the *last one* to the *Celestial City*. Beloved, in this life, you will suffer (one or all): *emotionally, spiritually, financially, relationally, vocationally, physically,* and then...*terminally!*
2. And when it's your bro/sis' time to *suffer*, you need to *remember them* – to put *sympathy in action*.

3. This fellowship was **not** a stranger to *persecution*. **Turn w/me to 10:32-35.**

- a. Many have *been* there and *done* that. Perhaps when **Emperor Claudius** had run Christians out of Rome almost **20** years earlier.
- b. The result was *public humiliation, loss of homes & property,* and *banishment*.
- c. But also *sympathy* → *care* from their church family. But *that* could be *dangerous!* To *visit* the prisoner was to be *identified* with the prisoner as a Christian. Perhaps the *next* person to be *ill-treated* would be *you...*
- d. Despite that, in time the early Church gained a *reputation*, even among those who hated us, of doing anything to *care for our own*. Some even *sold* themselves into *slavery* to buy the *freedom* of others.

- e. *Brotherly love – sympathy – is **not** just an emotion. Remembering is **more** than a picture on the refrigerator.*
 - i. **1 Jn 3:17** – *But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and **closes his heart** against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

“I was in prison and you visited Me.” Remember the prisoner...the ill-treated.

I want to close by sharing three reasons why brotherly love is so powerful (J. MacArthur):

1. *Love identifies us to the world as Christians. That’s because we love one another guided by an example and driven by a power the world doesn’t have.*
 - a. Jesus said (John 13:34-35): *“A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, **even as I have loved you**, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*
2. *Love identifies us to ourselves as Christians. I.e., brotherly love is a source of salvation assurance.*
 - a. **1 John 3:14** – *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.*
 - b. You should be able to tell that you **now** love in a way you **didn’t** use to love!
3. You *brotherly love* pleases God. In fact, we’ve already seen that in Hebrews!
 - a. **6:10** - *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.*

Let brotherly love continue – God won’t forget! ...pray...